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Adoption Day nets 5 new homes for children

Overall, program still has many kids waiting to be chosen

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Macomb Daily photo by David N. Posavetz

Sean Michael Lamer, 2, waves to onlookers in the courtroom Tuesday. Sean was formally adopted by maternal grandparents David and Anna Lamer.

If every case in the court system has its own story, then adoption cases may be among the few to feature happy endings.

That would explain why several judges, state officials and human services caseworkers wanted to be on hand Tuesday when five Macomb County families appeared for a public hearing to finalize adoption proceedings as part of the statewide Michigan Adoption Day.

"It wasn't easy for some of the process, but it turned out well in the end, and all the kids are together with us," said Stephanie Harrington of Clinton Township, who along with husband Jeffery completed the adoption of 6-year-old Olivia Thacker and also has guardianship of her two half-brothers, Zachary and Jeremy. "Of course for them, another good thing to come out of it was they could miss a day of school."



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"Yes!" Zachary and Olivia emphatically agreed with a high-five outside the courtroom.

The event, now in its fourth year, has involved at least 55 of Michigan's 83 counties and stems from a cooperative effort between the Michigan Supreme Court and the state Department of Human Services. Last year the state completed 274 adoptions statewide and officials expected this year's event would at least meet or exceed 250.

The children at Macomb County Circuit Court ranged from 17-year-old Desiree Lynn Paulk Squire, who takes part in high school swimming and aspired to a career in family law, down to 2-year-old Sean Michael Lamer, who aspired mainly to wave at everyone during Tuesday's proceedings and to make off with a set of the decorative balloons in the courtroom.

Formally adopted on Tuesday were Olivia Thacker to maternal aunt and uncle Jeffery and Stephanie Harrington of Clinton Township; Olivia Green, 11, to foster parents Clyde and Marsha Green of New Haven; Sean Lamer to maternal grandparents David and Anna Lamer; Angel Shock, 2, to foster parents Darin and Jodi Shock of New Baltimore; and Desiree Squire to paternal grandparents Marshall and Diana Squire of New Baltimore.

"This is a fortunate hearing and a fortunate day," said Chief Circuit Judge Antonio P. Viviano, who was on hand for Tuesday's proceedings. "What you are all agreeing to do here is something that is so important in children's lives."

The event is held to promote adoption since past studies have shown nearly 200 children in Macomb County and 4,400 children statewide are waiting to be introduced to new families. State officials have said Tuesday that 10,000 adoptions have been formalized since Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan spearheaded the initiative four years ago, but it is unclear if the program has led to more participation in the adoption process.

Mildred Smith-Roberts, foster care and adoptions coordinator for the DHS offices in Macomb County, said she believes adoptions are up but the problem is far from solved.

"I would say it has increased, but maybe not at a rate to compare with the need. There is an increasing number of children coming into the system in need of families, and every day we are getting more cases," she said. "So we still have a difficult job ahead of us."

Most children featured in Michigan Adoption Day proceedings came from families of abuse or neglect cases where parental rights were terminated in court proceedings for one or both biological parents. In most cases DHS prefers to place the child with relatives, like aunts and uncles or grandparents, but also frequently relies on foster families with a loving home environment.

One such family, the Greens, said afterward they have been taking in children as foster parents for 19 years and adopted many of them, including Olivia Green's sister Christine, along with raising four biological children of their own. They and Olivia all called the day a happy one and said they planned to celebrate via a visit to Country Buffet.

"She told us one (of her foster brothers) was so excited the other day about her getting adopted, because that meant the buffet was coming," Marsha Green said. "That's sort of become a tradition for us after these things."

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Even Circuit Judge Mark Switalski, who officiated Tuesday, had to commend the Greens on their efforts.

"My wife and I adopted three children, and you make me feel like we're part-timers here," he said.



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